

The First Marie Stopes Memorial Lecture

THE UNFINISHED SEXUAL REVOLUTION

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Editorial note. *March 17th, 1971 was the fiftieth anniversary of the opening by Marie Stopes of her birth control clinic in Holloway, London, the first of its kind in the UK and possibly in the world. In recognition of this notable event, the Board of the Marie Stopes Memorial Foundation, in conjunction with the University of York, has established a Marie Stopes Memorial Lecture to be given annually for a term of years. The first of the series was delivered on 12th March in the Department of Sociology, University of York, by Mr Laurie Taylor of that department. In introducing the speaker, Dr G. C. L. Bertram, the Chairman, emphasized the great contribution made by Marie Stopes to human welfare and gave a brief history of the clinic, which was soon moved to Whitfield Street. On Marie Stopes' death in 1958 the Memorial Foundation was set up to manage the clinic, still in Whitfield Street, and as a working monument to a great woman.*

Mr Taylor's script is printed below as delivered and it will be seen that the lecture was a notable one. Not only that, but it was delivered with the verve of a Shakespearean actor and the members of the large and appreciative audience will not readily forget the occasion.

A.S.P.

New Statesman ran a competition a few years before Marie Stopes' death in which prizes were awarded for the most appropriate last words to be attributed to well-known contemporary figures. It was hardly surprising that Marie was selected for attention by competitors. She was very well known. Indeed, when an American academic jury had been asked a few years earlier to select the twenty-five most influential books published in the previous 50 years, it named Marie Stopes amongst the top twelve authors, an honour she shared with Marx, Joyce, Veblen, Lenin, Trotsky, Freud, Einstein, Spengler, William James and Adolf Hitler. The prize winner in the *Statesman* competition suggested the following last words for this eminent birth-controller: 'Let joy be unconfined'. It would have been a good slogan for Marie's Society for Constructive Birth Control; it at least allowed

an emotional element to be associated with her work. As it was, the society laboured under the considerably more instrumental and less universalistic exhortation of 'Babies in the right places'. And it is with the eugenic tidiness of the latter injunction rather than with the liberatory promise of the former that Marie Stopes is now associated in the public mind.

The aim of my lecture this evening can be simply stated. I wish to correct this emphasis—to consider Marie Stopes as a sexual revolutionary rather than as a technologist of fertility (for this latter view see Fryer, 1965). To put it at its most pretentious, I want to look at the ideology which informed at least part of Marie's life, to see how this ideology related to other cultural themes which were fashionable in her time and which are still articulated today, and finally to suggest that the failure of her life—at least in terms of her own assessment if not of her biographers—was intimately bound up with the frustration of her ideological goals. This may sound rather daunting, but all that I am really doing is to suggest that we pay the same type of attention to Marie Stopes that we would expect to be paid by any sensitive student of the arts to a minor figure of letters. I am only suggesting that we treat Marie Stopes as a woman of theory as well as of practice.

If you look through the obituaries to Marie Stopes, and indeed at her major biography, you will form an impression of her as a spirited, noisy, and even shrill lady who was somewhat lacking in social graces and who did not appear prepared to take arguments other than her own into consideration. Most of all, you will gain the impression that she was a rather eccentric woman. Now this may well be a perfectly accurate description of Marie Stopes. Those who are responsible for it largely claimed to be her friends, they worked with her and were certainly committed to her birth control programme. The only reason for doubting the description is that it has so much in common with the standard descriptions of other feminine militants from Boadicea to Betty Freidan. We have a set of pejorative terms which we apply to women who publicly contradict the standard view of the female temperament. If women do not behave themselves—if they show evidence of dissatisfaction with life—then the truth is near at hand. They are women who, by some genetic accident, have inherited some masculine characteristics. Any successes they might have are due to this lucky hereditary stroke, whilst they must pay for their success by appearing eccentric to others—stuck as they are with inappropriate masculine characteristics in a female body. Marie's biographer, Keith Briant, was quite clear about all this—and more.

'The success of her teaching was due to the fact that she was a woman writing with a male personality and a male approach towards the sexual act.' (Briant, 1962.)

At other places in this book we are told of the hormonal abnormalities from which Marie suffered.

'She was', Briant laments, 'Highly, if not over sexed.' He should, for clarity, have added—at least for a woman. The principal trouble was that Marie Stopes

was too aggressive to be a real woman. She would not lie down, let alone lie still. She would insist upon competing with men and ignoring the type of advice for feminine bliss which is still to be found in psychology texts. One example must suffice:

'A woman finds her truest, most lasting, and most satisfying happiness in casting away her narcissism, and in yielding herself in love through complete surrender to her own underlying masochism.' (Worsley, 1949.)

Worst of all, Marie appeared to want as much sex as a man and this is what worries the friendly and otherwise sensitive Mr Briant. It is unfortunate that his concern does not rise much above medical commiseration—for this means that he misses the revolutionary importance of her assertions of sexual desire, it means that he relegates a key theoretical premise to the mere status of a symptom. For Marie was concerned to show that a woman's basic urges had a revolutionary significance; they were not evidence of hormonal malfunctioning, but were rather hints of true instinctive longings. She did not have a male approach to the sexual act, as Briant claims, she had an egalitarian approach to it—not a crude quantificatory egalitarianism—not of the 'An orgasm for you and one for me' variety—but an egalitarianism based on her belief in the essential empirical unity of man and woman. She had a theory of humanity, a philosophical anthropology, which rested upon a belief in certain underlying tendencies in men and women. But then Mr Briant shares with other commentators on Marie a slight sense of embarrassment about anything which smacks of ideology, let alone idealism. It is sometimes amusing to find these apparently hard-headed men—Mr Briant is by no means alone in this respect—moving with straight faces and clinical eyes amongst the pessaries and assorted rubber goods, suddenly coughing uneasily whenever they discover an ideology at the back of the drawer. As Briant says dismissively when he looks for a moment as though he might begin to discuss Marie's ideas with as much seriousness as he accords to her romantic liaisons, 'All we can say is that she was a woman blessed, or cursed, from an early age with an impossibly exaggerated idea of the male-female relationship' (Briant, 1962).

Once you abstract ideas from an individual's life, once you disregard man's attempts to pursue abstract goals, you tend to see his life as determined by situational factors, the birth of a child, the death of a wife, the smile of a pretty girl. You are in the world of the popular biographer, where life is measured out in incidents, not in ideas, where lives are changed not by loss of faith, by the finding of new philosophies and the abandonment of old, but by concrete, economic, social or interactional events. I want to suggest that Marie's ideas deserve more than this—that her ideas merit as much attention as, say Green's catholicism, or Orwell's socialism. This type of attention emancipates her from the clutch of situational biographers. It allows that her joys and depressions were linked to ideational reinforcements or negations as much as to the fortuitous appearance of Mr Right or the lucky disappearance of Mr Wrong.

Critics and biographers have had little difficulty in finding a structure in Marie's life. She self-consciously recorded her intentions to devote certain periods of her life to this or that intellectual pursuit, and then proceeded to stick to her promise, eventually announcing the shift to a new phase. Thus, in 1918, after the publication of *Married Love*, she declared that she would now engage in 20 years of concentrated public service, a decision that she would not abandon even in the face of G. B. Shaw's sensitive criticism, 'I think you should insist on the separation in the public mind of your incidental work as a scientific critic of contraception with your main profession as a teacher of matrimonial technique.' In 1938 she promptly declared her abandonment of this area, and announced her return to her earlier poetic and philosophical considerations, considerations which would allow her to make sense of the previous 20 years in terms of her underlying philosophy. The middle period from 1918 to 1938 in which she organized birth control clinics, conducted detailed research into problems of birth control, edited the *Birth Control News* and spoke at hundreds of public meetings, and engaged in dramatic and bitter litigation with the representatives of the Roman Catholic Church is the one which has attracted the most attention up till now. The continuity between the three phases can be easily overlooked by such a stress. The birth control campaign can gain an inappropriate autonomy from her other concerns (as of course Shaw was noting). I think that we can talk about the three phases, at the risk of simplifying matters, as (1) The Grand Ideal, (2) The Attainment of the Ideal through Technological Revolution, (3) Recognition of Failure and the Return to Abstract Idealism.

A less ideational biographical perspective involves talking of her unconsummated first marriage and the consequent appearance of *Married Love*, the meeting with handsome Humphrey Roe and the productive years of the Birth Control Clinics and finally the dismissal and consequent death of Humphrey Roe and her subsequent decline into selfish eccentricity. This latter account, apart from its avoidance of the role of ideas, has a recognizably masculine ring to it. Poor unsatisfied Marie sublimates all her sexual drives (her biographer notes with his usual concern that at the university she was 'certainly never lacking in sex-appeal nor under-sexed'). Anyway, all this unfulfilled sex goes into *Married Love* which can then, despite its massive popularity, be regarded as a piece of juvenile idealism, alongside the serious productive efforts of those consummated 20 years with Humphrey Roe. Finally, without a man to help her, she returns to such self-indulgent preoccupations as the writing of plays and poetry. Without a stress on ideas, the middle years of public service come to stand for most of Marie's life. And these are years which contain little explicit evidence of Marie's theoretical preoccupations.

Married Love is the key to Marie's philosophy. Because of its format—a guidance manual for newly-weds—its theoretical significance can be overlooked. This simple text proposes a way to transform society. In it, Marie claims to have

found the way in which human beings can get in touch with not only their true natures, but also with those of others. It is an account of the way to discover self and others. It is a programme which she set alongside socialism, christianity and fascism. It is not a tract advocating birth control. In fact there is only one aside to the subject in the first edition and it was only in subsequent books between 1918 and 1938 that this became a central technical issue. *Married Love* looked forward to a time when

‘. . . men and women will no longer fear and torture each other but profoundly understand and intensely love, and understanding will bring forth an entirely new type of human creature, stepping into a future so full of the real joy of self-expression and understanding that we here today may look upon our grandchildren and think that the Gods had decided to walk upon the earth.’ (Stopes, 1918.)

The issue of birth control is simply not central to the early philosophy. The emphasis in *Married Love* is upon the powers which may be released by a particular form of physical experience. There are, according to Marie, ‘immemorial laws of our physical being’, but these have become obscured by the everyday business of life. To put it into the Freudian terms to which it lends itself, the reality principle has come to replace the pleasure principle. We have become so concerned with material achievement that these instinctive life forces which are responsible for true happiness have been ignored or repressed.

‘In all life activities, house building, hunting or any other where intellectual and oral tradition comes in as it does with the human race, instinct tends to die out.’ (Stopes, 1918.)

Freud makes the same point more generally:

‘Civilisation has been built up, under the pressure of the struggle for existence by sacrifices in the gratification of the primitive impulses, and it is to a great extent for ever being repeated, as each individual successively joining the community repeats the sacrifice of his instinctive pleasure for the common good.’ (Freud, 1935.)

Apart from wanting to restore instinctive pleasure to the sexual act, Marie had a clear theory of the reasons why pleasure lay there:

‘God in the beginning not only created mankind male and female, but, when the two are united, in the intangible but inviolable bonds of love, they are One and this forms a more complex and perfected person, a higher unit than can be presented in any other way upon this earth.’ (Stopes, 1920.)

If we stick at this level, these sound little more than rather high-flown sentiments dignified by the claims of their divine origin. On this evidence Marie sounds little more than an amiable eccentric and we can be pleased that she got stuck into the birth control programme as effectively as she did. But there is more to be said. For one thing, it simply will not do to denigrate Marie because of her claims to

divine sponsorship. Where one is desperately short of allies, an Evangelist of the instincts in a rational world, a woman in a society dominated by men, then (as Joan of Arc discovered) divine sponsorship has its uses. Marie's mysticism was very limited. She gave more space to proposing scientific theory to explain the elevation of individuals through the sexual act. She was a distinguished scientist in her own right—an expert in paleobotany and well aware of the status of what she was proposing, well aware of the dangers of intuitions in science. In *Married Love*, she writes of the way

‘. . . in which the visible secretions and the most subtle essences which pass during union between man and woman affect the lives of each and are essentially vital to each other. And in the strictest scientific, as well as in a mystical sense, they *together* are a single unit, an individual entity.’ (Stopes, 1918.)

Not only was this passing of essences critical (and also strictly scientific) but it was also important that they were passed at the appropriate moments:

‘When with rectitude the two bodily units in obedience to the laws evidently ordained and clearly set forth by the physiological rhythm, by the daily, monthly and yearly pulsation of the body, they transfer each to each not only the vitalising waves of life, but in their bodies each receives from each substances materially presented as chemical and ultra-chemical molecules.’ (Stopes, 1920.)

But most important for this interchange is the equality which needs to exist between the two individuals. It is almost as though an imbalance in power between the two units would, as in a magnetic field, prevent any interchange of individually held elements. It is vital that in the act of union ‘. . . the two not only pulse together to the highest climax, but also remain thereafter in a long brooding embrace without severance from each other’ (Stopes, 1920). She was providing a scientific basis for mutual democratic sex.

This attribution to the orgasm of beneficial physical effects was shared by other sexual revolutionaries. Wilhelm Reich, like Marie Stopes, wanted to give some physiological meaning to the act which lay at the centre of his philosophical theory. He, also, wanted a scientific prop for his ideology (Reich, 1942, 1958, 1962). To this end he formulated his concept of life energy—Orgone. The balance of this orgone-energy was regulated by the orgasm. Unless there was a strong discharge of such energy during the orgasm, then sanity and mental hygiene would be affected. Neither Marie's theory of chemical intermixing, nor Reich's of energy homeostasis had any scientific validity, but they nevertheless performed the same theoretical function—that of providing a scientific underpinning for a critical part of their theories. They also contain important clues to the nature of the sexual relationship. Marie's intermixing is accomplished in brooding reverie, Reich's orgasms are much more explosive in their nature—a physical contrast which reflects their differing conceptions of the manner in which revolutionary

changes might be accomplished in society. They also, of course, have links with other non-scientific conceptions of the love relationship. Marie's alchemic formulations have a ready parallel in literary accounts of love. John Donne's poem, *The Ecstasie*, for example, contains the following lines:

'But as all severall soules contain
Mixture of things, they know not what,
Love these mixt soules doth mix againe
And makes bothe one, each this and that'.

But Marie's concern is not merely with the chemical and mystical blending of two bodies; it is with the enhancement of the whole of society. It will be better for all if the instincts are freed—sexual love can be reborn—it can save us all. This idea of sexual love as a panacea for societal ills was again not confined to Marie Stopes. It often appears as part of the ideology of women's liberation movements—almost as a sexual bribe to men to give up their advantages—a less negative version of Lysistrata's tactic. If women were liberated economically, goes the argument, then they would also become liberated sexually and there would be a pay-off for the whole of society. The most sensitive writer of the time on women's rights, Olive Schreiner, writing in 1911, argued that not only might the economic liberation of women give basic human rights to half mankind, but also that such liberation might be partially effected through the power of a new type of sexual love.

'It might be at last, that sexual love—that tired angel who through the ages had presided over the march of humanity with distraught eyes and feather shafts broken and wings drabbed in the mires of lust and greed and golden locks caked over with the dust of injustice and oppression . . . that sexual love can provide energy and life dispensing power—its history on earth has only just begun.' (Schreiner, 1911.)

Not that Marie regarded her proposals as nominally revolutionary. For her, in the 1920s, the word 'revolution' was linked up with the overthrow of existing social structures. It was concerned not with the advancement of human happiness but with the triumph of different social classes. She went so far as to see revolution as a symptom of unhappiness; as a result of the failure of human relationships rather than as a necessary preliminary to their improvement. In the early 1920s in a piece entitled *The Root of Revolution* she declared that revolution is not a natural activity for human beings: 'Though the revolutionary impulse has swept through sections of humanity many times in its history, it is essentially unnatural, an indication of warping and poisoning and a cause of further—perhaps irreparable damage, 'happy people do not indulge in revolution' (*Birth Control News*, 1922). Like D. H. Lawrence, Marie believed that instinctual liberation must be given a higher priority than 'the bread question'. 'The aim of reformers today should be to provide for everyone neither ease nor comfort, nor high wages nor short hours, but the deeper necessities of a full and contented life' (*Birth Control*

News, 1922). Of course, she was writing this close to the Russian Revolution, at a time when the spokesmen for that revolution were still apparently committed to breaking down such legacies of bourgeois existence as the family and the law. Marie was very much committed to marriage as well as other familiar institutions. Freedom had to start within the family and then spread outwards. There had, in other words, not to be so much an institutional revolution as a revolution in the day-to-day conduct which occurred within institutions. For Marie, the monogamous human relationship within marriage was the starting point of revolution. She defended the contemporary behaviour of married men in the following way:

'No. They are not polygamists, the finest young men of the present and of the future. Most men today are not in their heart of hearts polygamous in spite of all the outward signs to the contrary, in spite of the fact that so few of them have remained faithful to one woman. But they are ignorant of the sex laws and traditions, that sex knowledge which was the heritage of much less civilised tribes, and so they have trampled and crushed out the very thing for the growth of which their hearts are aching.' (Stopes, 1918.)

So, proper mutuality would increase the chances of a stable marriage—mutuality in sexual relationships that is. This apparently conservative emphasis upon monogamy is not, however, properly described as an attribute of reformers rather than revolutionaries. Wilhelm Reich certainly espoused beliefs which look anarchic beside many of Marie's; he insisted upon the necessity of a complete structural revolution, one which swept away the family along with other social institutions. For Reich (1962):

'The family was a factory for authoritarian ideologies and conservative structures. It forms the educational apparatus through which practically every individual of our society, from the moment of drawing his first breath has to pass . . . it is the conveyor belt between the economic structure of conservative society and its ideological superstructure.'

If, however, a structural revolution—and this is Reich's ideal—were accompanied by a sexual revolution in daily life (as of course it had not been in the Soviet Union), then this would mean a new sexual responsiveness amongst men—such that:

'They experienced full sensations in the act and therefore regarded it as an important part of their lives, not to be dealt with lightly as their former behaviour would indicate. That, in other words, they (would) become more "normal" in the sense of wanting only one partner—one who loved and satisfied them.' (See Limpus, 1968.)

There are those today who take a less sanguine view of the results of sexual liberation and who see the need for new suppressions to curb the sexual appetites of newly liberated women.

'One thing is certain: if woman's sexual drive has not abated, and they prove incapable of controlling it, thereby jeopardising family life and child care, a return to rigid, enforced suppression will be inevitable and mandatory. Otherwise the biological family will disappear . . .' (Shurley, 1969.)

Marie Stopes had in a way, then, an even more idealized view of the beneficial powers of the sexual instinct than had Reich who was persistently vilified by the Freudians for his idealism in this respect. Herbert Marcuse derisively dismisses Reich's ideas for this very reason. 'Sexual liberation *per se* becomes a panacea for individual and social ills . . . progress in freedom appears as a mere release of sexuality . . . a sweeping primitivism becomes prevalent' (Marcuse, 1955). But, given that the nature of monogamous relationships within marriage would be transformed by this new potent mutual orgasm—and it is important that it is just not any old orgasm that concerns Marie Stopes and Wilhelm Reich, it has to be an orgasm in which both partners' autonomy is recognized—then what were the results of this for society in general?

It is at this point that Marie's sociological analysis wears thin. She does not ever link together this new highly cohesive marital group and society with any persuasiveness. She does not see, as Freud (1930) did, that

' . . . the conflict between civilisation and sexuality is caused by the circumstance that sexual love is a relationship between two people in which a third can only be disturbing or superfluous, whereas civilisation is founded on relations between large groups of persons.'

The only way in which Marie could somehow overcome this problem, that is, the problem of how one can at one and the same time argue that society is improved by free sexual love and that such sexual love can only properly occur in a monogamous relationship insulated from that society, is rather unhappily resolved by importing some evolutionary glue to fit all the parts together.

'The whole trend of the evolution of human society has been toward an increased coherence of all its parts, until at the present time it is already almost possible to say that the community has an actual life on a plane above that of all the individuals composing it; that the community in fact is a super-entity. It is through the community of human beings and not in our individual lives that we reach an ultimate permanence upon this globe.' (Stopes, 1918.)

There is an almost Hegelian emphasis here in the way individual relationships are seen as paralleling the increasing coherence of other parts of society, the whole state of these units being somehow elevated by their incorporation into a societal super-entity.

At a more mundane level this type of perspective assumes a greater readiness on the part of the sexually liberated individuals to work for the community; and indeed Marie is led to argue that a perfect marriage leads one to work for the

community; that, as it were, having seen within the family a vision of the ideal community, we then go out and try to create it in the wider society. This is an interesting if empirically dubious perspective. It is dubious because, as Reich argued so forcefully, if we can achieve liberation in sexual relationships we will surely find the servitude of the average workplace unbearable by contrast. The work which has to be done in contemporary capitalist society cannot be informed by a delight comparable to that we may find in our sexual lives. This problem, as I have already suggested, was central for Freud also. Time and again he returned to the question of how far work in society could satisfy the basic instincts which were usually associated with sexual satisfaction. Unlike Marie Stopes, he argued pessimistically that the monotony and drudgery of work were antithetical to the gratification derived from sexual satisfaction. Not that this was the story for all societies. Primitive man was able to 'make his work agreeable, so to speak, by treating it as the equivalent or substitute for sexual activities' (Freud, 1935). In modern society, however, the sublimation of the sexual instincts in manual work must be labelled repressive. Only in science and art could non-repressive sublimation be obtained. This whole argument relates critically to current discussions about the significance of sexual permissiveness. It is necessary to enlarge upon this point so that Marie's problem, that of releasing instincts at one level and finding the results of such a release at other levels, can be better understood.

Now Marie Stopes did not have an adequate theory to explain why men and women had lost contact with their instincts in the first place. She could only say that men had become too concerned with material achievement and thus their instincts had become overlaid. But for the early Freud and for such neo-Freudians as Marcuse, the distorted nature of sexuality was not the result of an arbitrary overlay of materialism, it was not an overlay but a dynamic repression instituted however unconsciously by the familial agents of industrialized society. Freud pessimistically recognized the necessity for some instinctual repression, whilst allowing that there was more than was necessary and hoping that some marginal decrease would be possible. Marcuse goes further and regards this extra repression, in his terms this 'surplus repression' as not merely a redundant instinctual denial but as containing within it those restrictions which are necessary if one group is to enjoy domination over another in society (Marcuse, 1955). The repressions which are forced on us by the nature of the monogamic family, by the public control over private morals, by the hierarchial division of labour—these are not simply basic repressions which allow man to build civilization without falling back upon biological impulses—they are there to keep the masses in order—to keep them quiet to keep them dulled but still producing.

If we follow Marie's view, then a greater readiness by people to discuss sex, a freer distribution of literature on sexual techniques, a greater general knowledge about the delights of mutual orgasm, should all be liberatory. She saw herself as forcing her books through societal barriers in order to revive fundamental instincts.

But if we follow Marcuse there is a more cynical interpretation to be placed upon indications of greater freedom and permissiveness in sexual matters. The key concept here is repressive de-sublimation. Despite the term, the idea is simple. Given that the masses are effectively manipulated by a ruling class, and manipulated is the word—Marcuse would argue that government by repression has been replaced by government by seduction—then the new permissiveness does not indicate a revolutionary instinctive breakthrough on the part of the masses but rather the beginning of a subtler form of manipulation by the ruling class in that sex is now being integrated into work, advertising and public relations. What is happening is still repressive, not liberatory, but there is some de-sublimation involved, in that activities which once had no sexual content are now being sexualized—but for a specific purpose. The soft sell is replacing the hard sell; the television jingle is usurping the bayonet.

‘The eroticism of advertising, for example, is conducted not with the aim of enabling the individual to achieve and increase in his capacity for pleasure, but to stimulate sexuality just enough to make him manipulable by the economy.’ (Willener, 1970.)

In other words, an evening’s viewing of erotic advertising will not send us out dancing in the streets and close down the industrial processes in a vast festival of the oppressed; it will merely excite people just enough to get them to prefer one commodity to another, whether that commodity is a tin of beans or a new prime minister.

This may seem to be moving a long way from the editor of the *Journal for Constructive Birth Control and Racial Progress*. It sounds a little high-flown for the author of *Wise Parenthood* and *Birth Control Today*. But it is highly relevant to the author of *Married Love* for, in this most important of her testaments, Marie is trying to solve the problem of how we can reconcile the idea of instinctive freedom with the continuation of a particular type of society, with how we can dissolve repressions and with how we will know when such repressions are really dissolved. These are exactly the problems which absorb Freud and Marcuse.

A central difficulty for sexual revolutionaries is that nobody is quite clear which instincts are being liberated. Everyone agrees that there is repression, but what exactly is being repressed turns out to be very intimately related to the conception of society that one has. Marie’s sexual instincts—I mean her view of mankind’s sexual instincts—were relatively orderly urges. As we have seen, she did not consider that their gratification in the perfect sexual act would destroy family or any other basic social institutions.

Wilhelm Reich, who also idealized sexual urges, ascribed a far more revolutionary character to them. He will have none of the Freudian argument about the necessity of some repression for the maintenance of civilization. Or to put it another way, having no interest in the present civilization, he could hardly condone that repression which made it possible. As with Marie Stopes, the act of

liberation for Reich was the orgasm, but the liberation which was to follow from the successful orgasm was, for him, to be of a far more violent and anarchic nature than that envisaged by Marie. For her instincts were strong enough but they were also somehow beautiful and poetic. Writing about woman's deepest urges (1918) she says:

'Welling up within her are the wonderful tides, scented and enriched by the myriad experiences of the human race from its ancient days of leisure and flower-wreathed love making.'

But if Reich's instincts, or as he called them, primary biological impulses are more forceful elements than the ones perceived by Marie Stopes, less readily accommodated to existing social institutions, they were at least as pure and good as hers. For Reich, in common with Lawrence, saw nothing but a universal happiness as resulting from instinctual release and the abandonment of all repressions. As we have seen, this revolutionary change in man's psychic structure was not one which commended itself to Freud who—and the key concept here is his death instinct—took a far less optimistic view of the fundamental purity or goodness of the instincts.

Reich and Lawrence deal with this problem by asserting that Freud did not go deep enough into man's psyche. Reich admitted that there were, of course, in our subconscious, 'cruel, sadistic, lascivious, predatory and envious impulses' but this was only on the surface, it was not the 'deep natural core'. Lawrence, as Rieff has so well argued, was equally indignant with Freud for turning the unconscious into such an unsavoury place (Rieff, 1966). Commenting upon what Freud brought back from the unconscious he explained:

'Sweet heaven, what merchandise! What dreams, dear heart! What was there in the case? Alas that we ever looked! Nothing but a huge slimy serpent of sex, and heaps of excrement, and a myriad of repulsive little horrors spawned between sex and excrement. Is it true? No.' (See Rieff, 1966.)

There are few descriptions to be found of those who have set out to take this journey to the psychic interior. The contemporary literature on sex is so busy with technical advice that it does not spend much time describing the nature of true instinctual release, assuming, that is, that the apparent gymnasts who write such books ever encounter instinctual nirvana. But then they are more concerned with orgasmic productivity than with instinctual release, and, as we shall see, these may well be incompatible. However, there are groups amongst the many revolutionary factions in the Western world today who regard themselves as Reichians. Amongst these are small groups of urban guerrillas in the United States who attempt to precipitate the maximum amount of violence and destruction, not simply to overthrow society but also for their own psychic benefit. One of these individuals, writing in an underground paper (*King Mob* 3) records

the uncertainty that members of his group have begun to experience in following Reich's advice:

'Obviously violence has an enormous abreactive power, but as Reich underlined time after time, a flood of pleasure, anxiety and fury merely indicates the sweeping aside of the first major level of inhibition, of character and body armour. One's sense of an enormous underlying manic depressive swing with the Mother-fuckers [one of several names given to itself by the group—Ed.] would seem to confirm Reich's claim that the fundamental question is one of reconnecting on a far, far deeper level, on the level of a *primordial* energy—and let's hope it is a slightly more serene and ineluctable trip.'

A further unresolved problem for sexual revolutionaries is the exact status which is to be accorded to the orgasm. For Marie Stopes it was the orgasm which was central in her programme; it was the mutual orgasm which transformed social relationships. Reich and Lawrence also placed their stress here. But it can be argued that the orgasm, however potent, however mutual, does not involve a genuine instinctive release. One line of thinking suggests that the very quest for bigger and better orgasms involves an idealization of what Freud called the genital character, and is, thereby, fundamentally reactionary. There is nothing meta-physical about this. The argument is straightforward. When Freud discussed sexual interaction he distinguished fore-pleasure and end-pleasure. The fore-pleasure involved play with all parts of the body and represented a 'perpetuation of the pure, polymorphous play of infantile sexuality. The end pleasure in the orgasm is purely genital and post-pubertal' (Brown, 1959). It is during the fore-play that anything goes—that the pleasure principle is involved—that the early instinctually free characteristics of the young child are relived. The orgasm involves the suppression of all these elements for a calculated result—it is governed by the ego—by the reality principle, it involves rationality, planning, timing and control. In Norman Brown's (1959) words, 'The immortal child in us is frustrated even in the sexual act by the tyranny of sexual organisation.' The sadness which follows orgasm is the sadness induced by the abandonment of the instinctual pleasures involved in fore-play.

Certainly in contemporary texts on the orgasm, if not in Marie Stopes' original work, the orgasm is laid down as the necessary goal devoutly to be striven for. In an article entitled *Sex as Work*, Lewis & Brissett (1967) have analysed the treatment of sex-play in fifteen popular marriage manuals—all the well-known names are there—Butterfield, Chesser, Davis, Albert Ellis, Robert Hall, Robert Street and van de Velde. They conclude that all the authors examined treat sex-play as work. Those engaged in sexual relations are urged to put as much effort as possible into their behaviour and the orgasm itself is consistently regarded as the product of marital sex. It is also argued in these texts that successful sex depends upon having a work schedule and special techniques and equipment. Sex must not be treated frivolously according to these manuals:

'An ardent spur-of-the-moment tumble sounds very romantic . . . however, ineptly arranged intercourse leaves the clothes you had no chance to shed in a shambles, your plans for the evening shot, your birth control programme incomplete, and your future sex play under considerable better-be-careful-or-we'll-wind-up-in-bed-again restraint.'

Mutual climax must be worked for:

'Remember, *couple* effort for *couple* satisfaction! That's the key to well-paced harmonious sex play!'

What is happening here is that individuals are being told to work as hard as possible in order to become uninhibited.

'Nature is not enough . . . Man must pay for a higher and more complex nervous system by study, training and conscious effort.'

The dilemma is simply stated. Are the instincts somehow negated by such rational self-conscious sex work, or are they more truly realized? Must we learn complex techniques in order to unlock the instincts, in order to produce bigger and better orgasms or is our involvement in such rational organizing activities merely evidence that Brown is right, that true instinctive release occurs in unreflective fore-play, that the orgasm is fundamentally disillusioning? Certainly, he is able to claim that sexual techniques like *carezza* have been employed by mystical sects—and indeed advocated by contemporary youth groups—because they are said to permit access to deeper levels of consciousness. The ordinary means-end, rational production of a commodity is defeated by the long, non-orgasmic brooding embrace, an embrace which is only unlike that advocated by Marie Stopes in its temporal position during sexual interaction.

A final reflection is induced by this stress upon the orgasm in contemporary women's liberationist literature. The clitoral orgasm and the alleged mythical nature of the vaginal orgasm has assumed a revolutionary significance in that such a finding is said to render the man redundant in the sexual act. 'Lesbian sexuality, in rubbing one clitoris against the other, could make an excellent case, based on anatomic data, for the extinction of the male organ' (Koedt, 1970). The sexual revolution is upon us, it is argued, because women can produce their own orgasms, either by themselves or with other women, and that there is no intrinsic qualitative difference, but only a residual culturally induced experience of difference, between these orgasms and those which can be elicited by the man. But the hunt for new, better or more frequent orgasms, which with their discovery necessitates the formulation of new types of relationship between men and women does not stop at the differentiation, or pseudo-differentiation, between the vaginal and clitoral orgasm. Those who view the new permissiveness as a gradual stripping away of sexual repressions, a gradual re-sexualization of parts of the body that have been

historically de-sexualized, will not be surprised to hear about the anal orgasm as the latest example of anatomical liberation. In strict Freudian chronological terms, we should now be able to look forward to the oral orgasm. Finally, of course, if Brown is right, it is not at the actual orgasm that we should direct our attention at all, but at the polymorphous perversity which is rendered available by the sensitization of new bodily areas. The cult of the orgasm in itself is counter revolutionary. The truly sexually liberated are not distinguished by the frequency or the anatomical location of their orgasms, but rather by their emancipation from the whole orgasmic concern of contemporary sexuality.

The trouble with a view of sexual liberation which rests upon the power of the orgasm is not simply confined to these semi-theoretical considerations. There is also the hard fact that regular orgasms, mutual or otherwise, mean that one's future emancipation from customary societal restraints may well be imperilled by the presence of large numbers of dependent children. How do our various theorists deal with this problem and still retain their theoretical stress upon instinctual freedom? For D. H. Lawrence, it would appear that the idea of contraception suggests a repression, albeit a physical one, which has parallels with the hated psychic repressions. There is something wrong about contraception. In *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, Mellors and Lady Chatterley agree that it would not have been right to use any such techniques. However, Lawrence's insistence upon 'freedom' in sexual relations appears to be related to his fairly clear sense of the woman's role. His pregnant women are not weighed down with misery at the prospect of childbirth—they are big-bellied and dancing. They are, in other words, fulfilling their instincts by having children. They are fulfilled in pregnancy in the same way that they are fulfilled by relationships with a man. Freud's views on contraception are differently stated. He certainly expressed his dislike of contraceptives but this does not appear to be in any way an ideological objection. He was rather concerned with the ways in which anxieties about contraceptive technique might add further problems to the already highly sensitive area of sexual interaction. At least, this can be deduced from his remark to Mrs Strachey, the wife of the English translator—James Strachey—and one of his patients in Vienna. He said to her on one occasion, 'The greatest invention some benefactor can give mankind is a form of contraception which doesn't induce neurosis.' The optimists might argue that the invention has now been made.

Reich takes the argument in another direction. For him, it seemed that contraception, however crude, at least provided the opportunities for some relief of misery and the sexual satisfaction without additional responsibility which it provided was sufficient to give a hint of the type of fuller instinctual gratification which might be possible under socialism. His argument about contraception was therefore political. The workers were denied it because it contained within it possibilities for awakening the masses. His pamphlet, written in 1932, for working-class youth contained the following advice:

'The sheath should not be carried in a jacket pocket, because the rubber perishes in the warmth. If one does split and this is only noticed after intercourse, the girl must wash out her vagina at once with a solution of a tablespoon of vinegar in a litre of water.'

Reich goes on,

'Young proletarians will object, with reason, that in the circumstances in which they have intercourse this is impossible. All one can say in answer is that here is yet another reason for not simply worrying about the possibilities for sexual intercourse, but getting to know more about the form of social organisation which creates such problems for young people.'

However, as Reimut Reiche has argued in his recent book (1970), the contraceptive issue is hardly one to arouse class consciousness in contemporary society. The question now with the greater availability of contraception, swings back to Reich's primary concern with the qualitative distinction between apparent and real sexual freedom.

Finally, there is the case of Marie Stopes. The situation here was really quite dramatic. Having propounded a philosophy of sexual relations based upon mutual orgasm, a philosophy which even claimed a scientific basis in the passing of chemicals between bodies as they lay locked in the long brooding post-coital embrace, having propounded all this, she was suddenly then offered by her coincidental meeting with Humphrey Roe both the technical and financial opportunities of carrying her crusade to the whole nation. Marie did not simply favour any form of contraception. It was not her idea simply to relieve anxiety in intercourse and thus smooth the way for mutual orgasm, it was also her intention to promote that form of contraception—the cervical cap—which left the major part of her theory of chemical bonding intact. As long as it was the cap which was used, then the man's semen could pass directly into the woman, accompanied by those mysterious other substances. She was fortunate—and I don't mean this cynically—in having a flexible enough theory of instinctive gratification to allow the intrusion of cervical caps. D. H. Lawrence would have found it difficult to accommodate to his romantic metaphysic a heroine who retired, however briefly, to fit her mass-produced rubber diaphragm.

Marie Stopes was an idealist who had quite fortuitously been handed the means for realizing her ideals. An unusual situation. Particularly unusual in that the technology worked. Other reformers and revolutionaries have produced technical aids to assist the faithful towards fulfilment. Wilhelm Reich had his orgone box (the orgone energy accumulator) in which patients sat in order to be re-invigorated. More recently Ron Hubbard and the scientologists have advanced the E-meter as an aid to their followers (a machine which looks sufficiently like a simple galvanic skin response apparatus as to make one nervous about its £50 price tag). Neither the orgone box nor the E-meter nor the black box peddled by certain

faith healers really worked. They were central enough to the philosophies of their creators but their lack of efficacy had a negative rather than a positive feedback upon such philosophies, at least for the general public. Although we may be sympathetic to other worldly creeds which promise to transcend the dull materialism of contemporary life, we retain sufficient investment in instrumental rationality to expect advertised products to work—whether or not they enjoy celestial sponsorship.

Marie Stopes did not, like Reich, give contraception to the poor in order to raise their level of consciousness. The poor were chosen because it was there that the consequences of frequent and permissive—if not mutual—orgasms, were readily apparent. The motto of the Society for Constructive Birth Control and Racial Progress which Marie founded with Humphrey Roe was not social revolution for all through the orgasm, but simply ‘children in the right place’. Indeed, over the years, in the pages of the society’s newspaper one can see the stress shifting more towards the social control elements of contraception and away from the original idealistic philosophy. The following type of contribution was not unusual. Incidentally, this poem is ascribed to Gordon Mortlock, who sounds suspiciously like G. N. Mortlake—one of Marie’s early pseudonyms.

‘Let life use knowledge thus so dearly bought
Let England’s unborn be conceived in Peace.
Let all her future souls in joy be wrought;
Let every birth be love-desired increase
Then free from fear, motherhood’s power will rise
And rear the English race to meet the skies.’

(*Birth Control News*, 1923.)

Of course, once Marie was within this area of technological advocacy it was inevitable that there would be new demands upon her, that there would be attacks by leaders of other ideologies whose conflict with Marie was not over her original sexual theories as expressed in *Married Love* but was specifically related to her advocacy of birth control. It was not just catholicism which she had to fight. Her slightly absurd patriotic appeals are explicable in terms of the way in which her opponents used patriotism to attack her in the first place. In the 1930s there were highly advertised campaigns in Germany and Italy to boost population for patriotic ends. When Hannen Swaffer said to Churchill in 1935, ‘Tell me something about birth control’, Churchill took one second to reply, ‘Tell them unless they breed up to quota they’ll all be wiped out.’

I have not time, here, to provide a chronology of the way in which Marie’s idealism began to take a background position, compared to the everyday concerns of her birth control programme. Neither have I time to describe the way in which, after 20 years’ involvement in this campaign, she returned to her original concerns with sexual liberation in poetry and prose. Neither, of course, by the omission

of details of her 20 years' campaign have I, in any way, wished to take away from her all the traditional tributes which stress the brave way in which she set about relieving much human suffering. What I hope I have done, however, is to show that Marie Stopes can be credited with a sophisticated discussion of many of the basic issues which have concerned the leading sexual revolutionaries of this century. She certainly did not solve many of the problems which are endemic to this area—the actual nature of the repressed instincts, the problem of how a series of very close relationships can be the basis for an ideal community, the problem of how much importance to attach to the orgasm itself. But she at least consistently evinced an appreciation of the need for a change in everyday sexual life as a basis for any fundamental change in the extent of human happiness. The fact that she is simply remembered as a birth controller is because her message was systematically distorted—distorted in a familiar way. In our society, sex is partly something to be 'consumed', to be exploited for commercial ends. Demands for greater permissiveness, for less restrictions, for free birth control, for abortion on demand, for uninhibited sexual relations only have true liberatory meaning, at least in Marie's terms, if the promoted sexual activity involves relationships between fully autonomous individuals. Otherwise, all the devices and ideas simply make it easier for us to have meaningless relationships. And this is where the principal unanswered question reappears. Is any form of sexual permissiveness necessarily more revolutionary than the perpetuation of repressions? Do the pornographic films, the strip shows, the masturbating machines, give people a hint of freedom? do they begin to open the door to truer relationships, or are they fundamentally distorting? Do they, by their basic non-humanity, make it even more difficult for sex to be returned from bill boards and advertising agencies to human relationships? Or, alternatively, would we argue that it is now time for an attack upon permissiveness, on the grounds that there is nothing revolutionary about breaking sexual mores, when there is semi-official encouragement for such transgressions, when society appears able to accommodate itself to sexual deviance. Perhaps there is nothing intrinsically revolutionary about sexual freedom; the impact of writers like Marie Stopes is only evident under times of repression. There may now be no rules to break. Albert Camus' argument for chastity is related to this point:

'Sexuality leads to nothing. It is not immoral, but it is unproductive. One can give oneself to it for a time when one does not wish to produce. But chastity alone is connected with personal progress. There is a time when sexuality is a victory—when it is released from moral imperatives. But it quickly becomes a defeat afterwards—and the only victory is won over it in its turn: that is chastity.' (Quoted by Rieff, 1966.)

In her final years, Marie Stopes thought of her life as a failure. Her last days were not happy ones; her sorrow is not to be glibly explained, as it has been done, as merely the result of personal selfishness and eccentricity. For the truth was that,

despite the packed meetings, the best-selling books, the recognition by the bishops, she had failed. Man's instincts had appeared to let her down. She had not bargained for the ways in which society could transform scientific advances into mere instruments for maintaining itself intact. Like other revolutionaries, who had hoped to transform the world through sexual liberation, she had to witness the incorporation of her ideas into a way of life which was fundamentally antithetical to them. There was no evidence that men loved each other better or more for all her ideas and her technology.

Only Ronald Blythe, writing an obituary to Marie Stopes in 1959 in the *New Statesman* had the sensitivity to perceive the way in which Marie's technological innovations had broken away from their idealistic base and come to have a value in their own right, a value which was fundamentally opposed to the idealism which originally informed their dissemination,

'She saw the world divided up between midgets and giants—and there were few giants these days. It was pure emotion which made the giants, the throbbing, rapturous, chosen ones, and fear of emotion which ordained the midgets. She was sick to death of us all. She had taught the man in the street to heave overboard the prurience and taboos of centuries, so that he might soar up into the ultimate fulfillment of bliss and what had he done? The oaf had used the gift like an extra gadget in the lavatory.'

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